

The preaching and healing ministry of Jesus began 2000 years ago. From its humble beginnings, few would have guessed his lasting impact. The parable that Jesus tells about the kingdom of God and the mustard seed puts everything in perspective. The kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed that when it grows becomes a large bush able to shelter all the birds who come to dwell in its branches (Lk 13:19).

The Old Testament is full of tiny seeds planted by the Lord which flourish during the life and ministry of Jesus. The prophet Ezekiel described earthly kingdoms as mighty trees that were cut down and came to an end. The downfall came from a tiny shoot that the Lord planted. “On the mountain height of Israel, I will plant it. It shall put forth branches and bear fruit and become a majestic cedar. Every small bird will nest under it, all kinds of winged birds will dwell in the shade of its branches” (17:23).

The life of Jesus was cut down as the Pharisees and scribes plotted to put his ministry to an end. On Calvary, Jesus died. His dead body was planted in the tomb. Sin and death were conquered, and Jesus rose from the dead. After 40 days, Jesus ascended into heaven. Every soul is invited to nest in heaven in the presence of God at the end of life.

The kingdom of God is not just a future kingdom in heaven. Jesus came to establish the kingdom here on earth. God’s kingdom is revealed in insignificant people.<sup>i</sup> Just prior to this parable, Jesus healed a woman who had been ill for 18 years. “He laid his hands on her, and she at once stood up straight and glorified God” (Lk 13:13). Severely burdened, the woman was able to do very little. She could hardly function. In healing her, Jesus reminds us of the dignity of the poor and the lowly. And the woman, with a new lease on life will be like the mustard seed that blossoms. She will proclaim the kingdom of God and draw others to the healing ministry of Christ. She will bear fruit and invite many others to come to Jesus.

Each human life starts from a tiny seed. Amidst all of our burdens and struggles, Jesus offers us healing especially in the forgiveness of our sins. In addition to forgiving others as we have been forgiven, we are also called to proclaim the kingdom of God. As we plant tiny seeds for Jesus, we are capable of untold good.

Jesus tells a second parable about leaven. “To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed [in] with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch of dough was leavened” (Lk 13:20-21). A tiny amount of leaven, mixed with a large amount of flour will feed more than a hundred people.<sup>ii</sup>

This parable also has reference to the healing of the woman who had been burdened for 18 years. When Jesus healed her, his adversaries tried to find fault with him for healing on the sabbath. In the words of Jesus, “Beware of the leaven—that is, the hypocrisy—of the Pharisees” (Lk 12:1). The leaven of the kingdom will bear much fruit. The leaven of the Pharisees is cancerous. It seeks to destroy the kingdom.

It is all too easy to tear something down and destroy it. We must always be on guard to use the gifts that God has given us as he intended. We are called to mix the tiny amount of leaven that we have in order to feed others.

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<sup>i</sup> Gadenz, Pablo T. *The Gospel of Luke (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture)*. Pg. 255.

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid*, Pg. 256.